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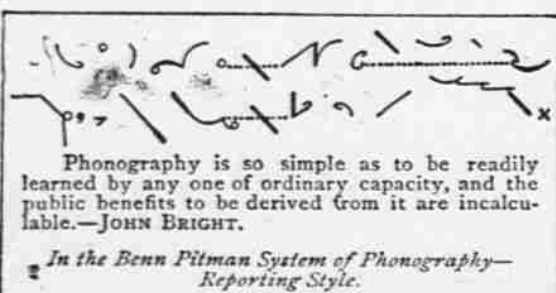
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DENTIST

The SOWERS

By
Henry Seton Merriman

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(CONCLUDED FROM LAST WEEK)

and for one brief moment the crowd stood still, watching one of their ring-leaders, who was turning and twisting on his side half a dozen steps from the bottom.

Then Paul raised his voice.

"Listen to me!" he said.

But he got no further, for some one shot at him from the background, over the frantic heads of the others, and missed him. The bullet lodged in the wall at the head of the stairs in the jamb of the gorgeous doorway. It is there today.

There was a yell of hatred and an ugly charge toward the stairs, but the sight of the two revolvers held there motionless for a few moments. Those in front pushed back, while the shouters in the safe background urged them forward by word and gesture.

Two men holding a hundred in check! By one of the two was a prince, which makes all the difference and will continue to make that difference, despite half penny journalism, until the end of the world.

"What do you want?" cried Paul.

"Oh, I will wait!" he shouted in the next pause. "There is plenty of time—when you are tired of shouting!"

Several of them proceeded to tell him what they wanted—an old story, too stale for repetition here. Paul recognized in the din of many voices the tinkling arguments of the professional agitator all the world over.

"Look out!" said Paul. "I believe they are going to make a rush!"

All the while the foremost men were edging toward the stairs, while the densely packed throng at the back were struggling among themselves. In the passages behind some were yelling and screaming with a wild intonation which Steinmetz recognized. He had been through the commotion.

"Those fellows at the back have been killing some one," he said. "I can tell by their voices. They are drunk with the sight of blood."

Some new orator gained the ears of the rabble at this moment, and the ill kempt heads swayed from side to side.

"It is useless," he cried, "telling him what you want! He will not give it to you! Go and take it! Go and take it, little fathers! That is the only way!"

Steinmetz raised his hand and peered down into the crowd, looking for the man of eloquence, and the voice was hushed.

At this moment, however, the yelling increased, and through the doorway leading to the servants' quarters came a stream of men, blood stained, ragged, torn. They were waving arms and implements above their heads.

"Down with the aristocrats! Kill them! Kill them!" they were shrieking.

A little volley of firearms further excited them. But vodka is not a good thing to shoot upon, and Paul stood untouched, waiting, as he had said, until they were tired of shouting.

"Now," yelled Steinmetz to him in English, "we must go! We can make

a stand at the head of the stairs, then the doorway, then"—He shrugged his shoulders. "Then—the end," he added as they moved up the stairs step by step backward. "My very good friend," he went on, "at the door we must begin to shoot them down. It is our only chance. It is, moreover, our duty toward the ladies."

"There is one alternative," answered Paul.

"The Moscow doctor?"

"Yes."

"They may turn," said Paul. "They are just in that humor."

The newcomers were the most dangerous. They were forcing their way to the front. There was no doubt that



Two men holding a hundred in check!

as soon as they could penetrate the densely packed mob they would charge up the stairs even in face of a heavy fire. The reek of vodka was borne up in the heated atmosphere, mingled with the nauseating odor of filthy clothing.

"Go," said Steinmetz, "and put on your doctor's clothes. I can keep them back for a few minutes."

There was no time to be lost. Paul slipped away, leaving Steinmetz alone at the summit of the state stairway, standing grimly, revolver in hand.

In the drawing room Paul found Maggie alone.

"Where is Etta?" he asked.

"She left the room some time ago."

"But I told her to stay," said Paul.

To this Maggie made no answer. She was looking at him with an anxious scrutiny.

"Did they shoot at you?" she asked.

"Yes, but not straight," he answered, with a little laugh, as he hurried on.

In a few moments he was back in the drawing room, a different man, in the rough, stained clothes of the Moscow doctor. The din on the stairs was louder. Steinmetz was almost in the doorway. He was shooting economically, picking his men.

With an effort Paul dragged one or two heavy pieces of furniture across the room in the form of a rough barricade. He pointed to the hearth rug where Maggie was to stand.

"Ready!" he shouted to Steinmetz.

"Come!"

The German ran in, and Paul closed the barricade.

The rabble poured in at the open door, screaming and shouting. Blood-stained, ragged, wild with the madness of murder, they crowded to the barricade. There they stopped, gazing stupidly at Paul.

"The Moscow doctor! The Moscow doctor!" passed from lip to lip. It was the women who shouted it the loudest. Like the wind through a forest, it swept out of the room and down the stairs. Those crowding up pushed on and uttered the words as they came. The room was packed with them.

"Yes!" shouted Steinmetz at the top of his great voice. "And the prince!"

He knew the note to strike and struck with a sure hand. The barricade was torn aside, and the people swept forward, falling on their knees, groveling at Paul's feet, kissing the hem of his garment, seizing his strong hands in theirs.

It was a mighty harvest. That which is sown in the people's hearts bears a thousandfold at last.

"Get them out of the place! Open the big doors!" said Paul to Steinmetz. He stood cold and grave among them.

Some of them were already sneaking toward the door—the ring-leaders, the talkers from the towns, mindful of their own necks in this change of feeling.

Steinmetz hustled them out, bidding them take their dead with them. Some of the servants reappeared, peeping, white faced, behind curtains. When the last villager had crossed the threshold these ran forward to close and bar the great doors.

"No," said Paul from the head of the stairs; "leave them open."

Steinmetz in the drawing room looked at Paul with his resigned, semihumorous shrug of the shoulders.

"Touch and go, mein lieber!" he said.

"Yes; an end of Russia for us," answered the prince.

He moved toward the door leading through to the old castle.

"I am going to look for Etta," he said.

"And I," said Steinmetz, going to the other entrance, "am going to see who opened the side door."

CHAPTER XXXIX.

"WILL you come with me?" said Paul to Maggie. "I will send the servants to put this room to rights."

Maggie followed him out of the room, and together they went through the passages, calling Etta and looking for her. There was an air of gloom and chilliness in the rooms of the old castle. The outline of the great stonework, dimly discernible through the wall paper, was singularly suggestive of a fortress thickly disguised.

"I suppose," said Paul, "that Etta lost her nerve."

"Yes," answered Maggie doubtfully. "I think it was that."

Paul went on. He carried a lamp in one steady hand.

"We shall probably find her in one of these rooms," he said. "It is so easy to lose oneself among the passages and staircases."

They passed on through the great smoking room, with its hunting trophies. The lynx, with its face of Claude de Chauville, grinned at them darkly from its pedestal.

Halfway down the stairs leading to the side door they met Steinmetz coming hastily up. His face was white and drawn with horror.

"You must not go down here," he said in a husky voice, barring the passage with his arm.

"Why not?"

"Go up again," said Steinmetz breathlessly. "You must not go down here."

Paul laid his hand on the broad arm stretched across the stairway. For a moment it almost appeared to be a physical struggle; then Steinmetz stepped aside.

"I beg of you," he said, "not to go down."

And Paul went on, followed by Steinmetz and behind them Maggie. At the foot of the stairs a broader passage led to the side door, and from this other passages opened into the servants' quarters and communicated through the kitchens with the modern building.

It was evident that the door leading to the grassy slope at the back of the castle was open, for a cold wind blew up the stairs and made the lamps flicker.

At the end of the passage Paul stopped.

Steinmetz was a little behind him, holding Maggie back.

The two lamps lighted up the passage and showed the white form of the Princess Etta lying huddled up against the wall. The face was hidden, but there was no mistaking the beautiful dress and hair. It could only be Etta. Paul stooped down and looked at her, but he did not touch her. He went a few paces forward and closed the door. Beyond Etta a black form lay across the passage, all trodden underfoot and disheveled. Paul held the lamp down, and through the mud and blood Claude de Chauville's clear cut features were outlined.

Death is always unmistakable, though it be shown by nothing more than a heap of muddy clothes.

Claude de Chauville was lying across the passage. He had been trodden underfoot by the stream of mad-dened peasants who had entered by this door which had been opened for them, whom Steinmetz had checked at the foot of the stairs by shooting their ring-leader.

De Chauville's scalp was torn away by a blow, probably given with a spade or some blunt instrument. His hand, all muddy and bloodstained, still held a revolver. The other hand was stretched out toward Etta, who lay across his feet, crouching against the wall. Death had found and left her in an attitude of fear, shielding her bowed head from a blow with her up-raised hands. Her loosened hair fell in a long wave of gold down to the bloodstained hand outstretched toward her. She was kneeling in De Chauville's blood, which stained the stone floor of the passage.

Paul leaned forward and laid his fingers on the bare arm just below a bracelet which gleamed in the lamplight. She was quite dead. He held a lamp close to her. There was no mark or scratch upon her arm or shoulder. The blow which had torn her hair down had killed her without any disfigurement. The silken skirt of her dress, which lay across the passage, was trampled and stained by the tread of a hundred feet.

Then Paul went to Claude de Chauville. He stooped down and slipped his skilled fingers inside the torn and mud stained clothing. Here also was death.

Paul stood upright and looked at them as they lay, silent, motionless, with their tale untold. Maggie and Steinmetz stood watching him. He went to the door, which was of solid oak four inches thick, and examined the fastenings. There had been no damage done to bolt or lock or hinge. The door had been opened from the inside. He looked slowly around, measuring the distances.

"What is the meaning of it?" he said at length to Steinmetz in a dull voice. Maggie winced at the sound of it.

Steinmetz did not answer at once, but hesitated, after the manner of a man weighing words which will never be forgotten by their hearers.

"It seems to me," he said, with a slow, wise charity, the best of its kind, "quite clear that De Chauville died in trying to save her. The rest must be only guesswork."

"I suppose," he went on after a little pause, "that Claude de Chauville has been at the bottom of all our trouble. All his life he has been one of the stormy petrels of diplomacy. Wherever he has gone trouble has followed later. By some means he obtained sufficient mastery over the princess to compel her to obey his orders. The means he employed were threats. He had it in his power to make mischief, and in such affairs a woman is so helpless that we may well forgive that which she may do in a moment of panic. I imagine that he frightened the poor lady into obedience to his command that she should open this door."

He spread out his hands in deprecation. In his quaint Germanic way he held one hand out over the two motionless forms in mute prayer that they might be forgiven.

"We all have our faults," he said. "Who are we to judge each other? If we understood all we might pardon. The two strongest human motives are ambition and fear. She was ruled by both. I myself have seen her under the influence of sudden panic. I have noted the working of her great ambition. She was probably deceived at every turn by that man, who was a scoundrel. She must have repented of her action when she heard the clatter of the rioters all round the castle. I am sure she did that. I am sure she came down here to shut the door and found Claude de Chauville here. They were probably talking together when the poor mad fool who killed them came round to this side of the castle and found them. They recognized her as the princess. They probably mistook him for the prince. It is what men call a series of coincidences. I wonder what God calls it?"

He broke off, and, stooping down, he drew the lapel of the Frenchman's cloak gently over the marred face.

"And let us remember," he said, "that he tried to save her. Some lives are so. At the very end a little reparation is made. In life he was her evil genius. When he died they trampled him underfoot in order to reach her. Mademoiselle, will you come?"

He took Maggie by the arm and led her gently away. She was shaking all over, but his hand was steady and wholly kind.

He led her up the narrow stairs to her own room. In the little boudoir the fire was burning brightly; the lamps were lighted, just as the maid had left them at the first alarm.

Maggie sat down, and quite suddenly she burst into tears.

Steinmetz did not leave her. He stood beside her, gently stroking her shoulder with his stout fingers. He said nothing, but the gray mustache only half concealed his lips, which were twisted with a little smile full of tenderness and sympathy.

Maggie was the first to speak. "I am all right now," she said. "Please do not wait any longer and do not think me a very weak minded person. Poor Etta!"

Steinmetz moved away toward the door.

"Yes," he said, "poor Etta! It is often those who get on in the world who need the world's pity most."

At the door he stopped.

"Tomorrow," he said, "I will take you home to England. Is that agreeable to you, mademoiselle?"

She smiled at him sadly through her tears.

"Yes, I should like that," she said. "This country is horrible. You are very kind to me."

Steinmetz went downstairs and found Paul at the door talking to a young officer, who slowly dismounted and lounged into the hall, conscious of his brilliant uniform, of his own physical capacity to show off any uniform to full advantage.

(CONTINUED ON THIRD PAGE)